

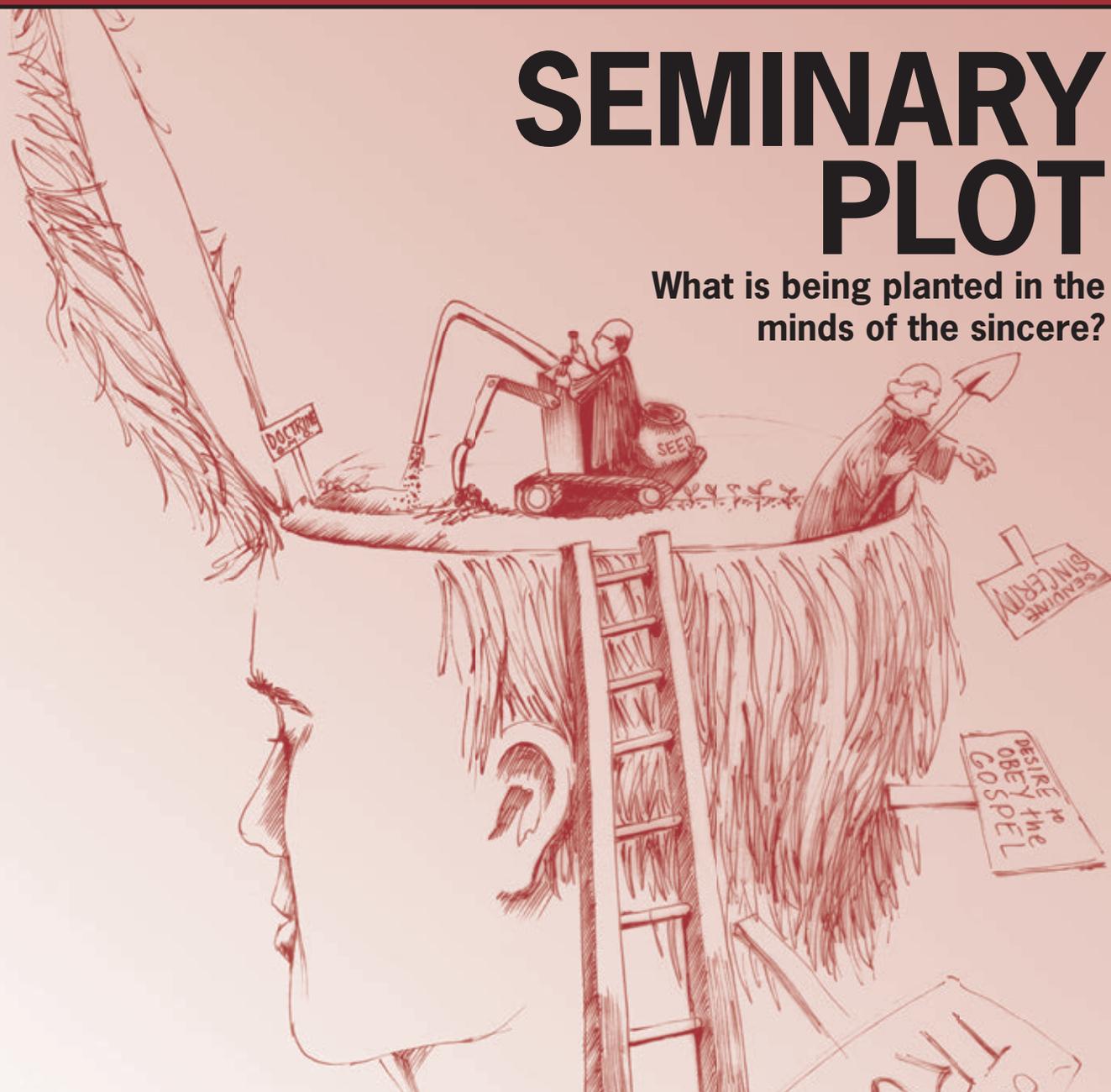
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Winter 2010

Christian Dissenter

SEMINARY PLOT

What is being planted in the
minds of the sincere?



FREE

The Sorcerer's
Touch *p. 2*

*How to conjure up the
mystical unity of Christ*

What Happens When
the Shepherd Strays? *p. 11*

Church leadership in crisis

“Do you feel it?” The man asked me, as I sat in front of him with my hands cupped around a large, imaginary ball.

“I’m afraid not,” I answered.

We had been sitting and talking in the living room of our home in France when the visitor decided I needed to know about the “realization of energy.” He was simply not interested in hearing the things I had to say about why we lived together, and what salvation really means. He wanted to show me real power. He



THE SORCERER'S TOUCH

said that he has sessions in which he teaches New Age techniques in self-realization. Many people attend, and many leave, having felt and handled the Ball. They are even able to pass it to one another.

“What ball?” I asked.

Moving his chair in front of mine, he told me to cup my hands together a little distance apart. Cupping his own hands, he showed me what he meant. Leaning forward in his chair enthusiastically he said, “Now start feeling the energy of the ball. Move your hands around as if you had a ball between them, and you will feel the ball itself.”

I moved my hands around and around, feeling a bit silly. I wanted this man to hear more of what I wanted to say to him, so I felt I had

to humor him. He asked me several times whether I was starting to feel the ball. Each time I told him I didn't. This went on for quite some minutes.

“Surely you feel the heat energy by now,” he stated expectantly.

“Uh, not really,” I replied.

He finally got frustrated and sat back in his chair with what looked like a pouting expression on his face. He was quiet for a moment, then he told me that I just wasn't spiritual enough. I was quite relieved to hear that. He and his

wife didn't stay long after that little episode. They never came to visit us again. I've often wondered whether the people who told him they felt the ball were really only pretending, but just didn't want to feel stupid or left out.

What is a Body?

soma — the body as a sound whole.

sound — solid, palpable, without defect, healthy.

The Body of Christ is invisible. That's what three years of Bible school had pounded into me. I learned that the Body of Christ is spread all over the world, but no one can see it. You can only meet a part of the Body of Christ when you meet a Christian. No matter where you are in the world, even if he is not a member of your church, or of the same denomination, every Christian is still part of the invisible Body of Christ.

I accepted that doctrine for a few years, until my heart started desiring something more than weekly meetings. There were people I met whom I liked very much, but if they were of another denomination, there was always a wall between us when I mentioned the fact that I was an evangelical. They probably didn't like the wall any more than I did.

Yet there would be large gatherings and conferences where we would all sing together and celebrate our unity and oneness. We would say that the Body of Christ is one, and that we were in unity. We would all leave after a few days of this, flushed with the euphoria of our imaginary unity. I don't remember ever getting in contact with anyone I met at such

gatherings, and I don't remember any of them ever getting in contact with me.

After ten years of trying to convince myself that the Body of Christ is really united, but invisible, I gave it up. In my heart I really wanted to do God's will, but I knew that there was no reality in my life, nor in the things I was trying to convince myself of.

There were times when, as a Christian, I heard certain things and I got really good feelings. There were moments when I really thought I believed what I was saying

Many people attended his New Age sessions, having felt and handled the Ball. "What ball?" I asked.

to others. But as the years went by, I began to face the reality of the rottenness of my own life and the lives of many others I knew well. It was clear that there was no reality in the words, but I had to keep up the pretense, because there was nothing else to hope in.

Eventually I was so miserable that I lay on the floor of the radio station where I worked, time after time, begging God to take my life, or to show me something real. I knew I wasn't going to change, being a part of the unreality I had known for ten years. I wasn't going to pretend that I could feel that "ball" in my hands when I really couldn't.

There are literally thousands of Christians trying to reconcile their doctrine of unity with the reality of the division they see in their own lives and churches. They are not satisfied with the answers they get

when they question this puzzling idea.

The Bible talks about Christ being the head of the Body. When you look up that word, *soma*, in the Greek, you see that it refers to a concrete, visible, palpable reality. That's what Paul was speaking of when he wrote:

And He put all things His feet, and gave Him be over all the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

He spoke of the visible reality of the Body of Christ, which he saw functioning before him every day. It wasn't something people had to give mental assent to in spite of the fact that they didn't see it. When Paul spoke of the Body, he spoke of something that could be confirmed right before the eyes of those to whom he was speaking. The Body was a visible entity, comprised of people living together, caring for one another daily, and sharing all that they had with one another. It was a vibrant, living organism that anyone could see functioning at any time.

That description did not fit my church, or any other church I ever saw or visited. We were not that visible *soma* that Paul spoke of. Every time he mentioned the Body, he used the word *soma* which meant a *corporeal* entity. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul uses this same word *soma*, speaking of a *real* body. There is nothing in the Scriptures that even hints at an invisible body. Everything speaks of working together, living together,² sharing together,³ even thinking together.⁴ There was no concept in their minds of not being together.⁵ They understood the reality of a

tangible, concrete, flesh-and-blood body.

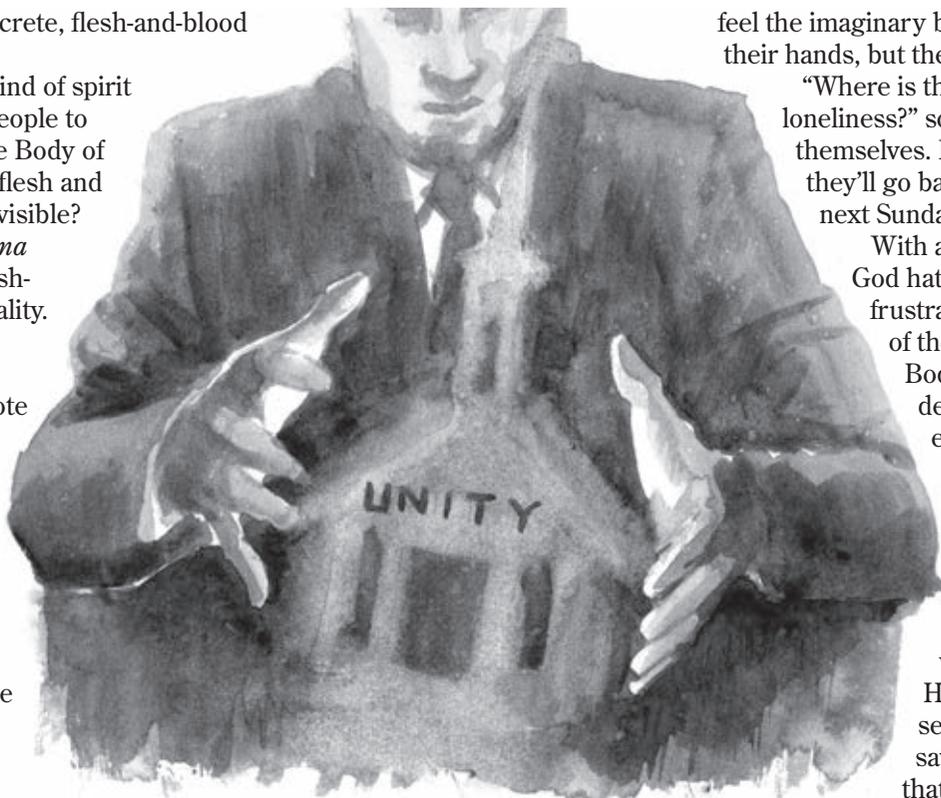
So what kind of spirit would lead people to insist that the Body of Christ is *not* flesh and blood, but invisible?

The word *soma* denotes a flesh-and-blood reality.

The words *invisible* or *mystical* denote intangibility.

They speak of something that cannot be seen or touched.

There is nothing in the Scriptures that teaches this kind of



feel the imaginary ball between their hands, but there is no unity.

“Where is the unity in loneliness?” some ask themselves. Never mind, they’ll go back for renewal next Sunday.

With all His heart, God hates this frustrating message of the invisible Body. He is determined to establish the *visible* Body of Messiah on this earth as a witness. This is the way the world will know that He really did send His Son to save them, and that He really does

The spiritual force that convinces people that they are united, when all their clear faculties tell them that they are divided, is the same spiritual force that energizes sorcery. It’s the same spirit that tells you that there is a ball in your hands when actually there is nothing but air.

thinking. John insisted the contrary.⁶ To deny the visibility of the Body of Christ is to deny its corporeal, tangible reality. To say it is invisible is to relegate the Body to the realm of mystical unreality. John calls this the spirit of antichrist.

The spiritual force that convinces people that they are united, when all their clear faculties tell them that they are divided, is the same spiritual force that energizes sorcery. It’s the same spirit that tells you that there is a ball in your hands when actually there is nothing but air.

In the midst of music, ceremony, and incantations, Christians are persuaded to ignore the daily reality of the disunity they live, and to trust the euphoria and persuasion of the momentary gathering. They ride the crest of the wave of their emotions, dancing, shouting, singing, and hoping to bring into reality something that really doesn’t exist. When the gathering is over, they go home to their ordinary or miserable existence, wishing that it hadn’t ended, hating to be reminded that what they knew all along is true. They try in vain to

love them just as much as He loves His Son.

That visible life of love and unity has already begun. We invite you to come and see for yourself the reality of the living Body of Messiah, made up of faulty but loyal brothers and sisters who have given up everything to follow Yahshua, the Messiah, as He commands. Their full-time life of love, caring, and sharing is what forgiveness is all about. That is the reality of the visible Body of Messiah. ☒

¹Ephesians 4:16 ²Acts 2:44-47 ³Acts 4:32-37 ⁴1 Corinthians 1:10 ⁵1 John 2:19 ⁶1 John 4:1-3 *Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See p. 19.

EXERCISE CLUB

Do you walk the walk, or just talk the talk?



“Hey Jim,” Mike said to his friend, “I’m joining the new exercise club opening downtown.”

“That’s so good, Mike,” his long-time friend responded, “you need the exercise.”

Mike didn’t take offense; it was true, and his middle-age bulge was more than showing. Jim worked outdoors and his health and strength showed it. Mike’s work as a stockbroker was both intense and indoors. He was beginning to wonder whether it was worth it. Just the other day one of his coworkers had a heart attack, on the job no less. That had pushed it over

the top for him; *it was time to start working out.*

Summer was Jim’s busiest time of the year as a landscaper and he hardly saw his friend Mike. They got together for dinner after Labor Day and Jim looked forward to seeing the change in his friend. When they had been teenagers together, they were both strong and active. Maybe some of his old self would be back after three months of working out. He was shocked by what he saw when he walked into the restaurant. Mike looked worse than ever. But what was more shocking was what he said.





“Jim, that exercise club I joined is so great! We love being together. I go twice a week, sometimes three. It’s really inspiring.”

“Oh, that’s nice, Mike,” Jim said, trying to hide the confusion he felt, and the embarrassment. Mike looked terrible. What kind of exercises was he doing? Eventually, Jim asked what they did at the club.

A look of understanding came over Mike’s face, “I was wondering why you looked kind of funny when you walked in. You’re thinking, ‘What do they do there, right?’”

Jim just nodded. He was kind of emotional, and didn’t trust himself to speak.

“We all get together,” Mike said, “and the owner of the club tells us all about exercising. I have learned such marvelous things about the body,” his smile getting bigger and his voice raising in enthusiasm, “how it’s put together, and how exercise, heck, any activity, makes things just work better inside.”

“That’s nice, Mike,” Jim said, pausing. “Umm, when do you work out?”

“Work out?” Mike repeated his question in a puzzled tone of voice. “We don’t need to work out. We’re just there to learn. And we enjoy being together and hearing stories about the great athletes of the past.”

“The great athletes of the past?” It was Jim’s turn to repeat what his friend said, with the same puzzlement.

“What good is that going to do you?”

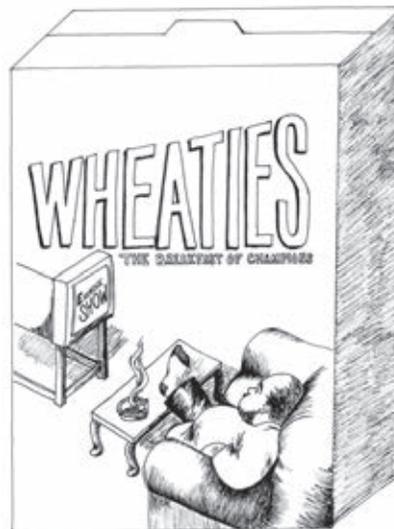
There was a little offense in Mike’s voice now, as Jim’s insistence on actually exercising began to annoy him. “Jim, we hear all about exercising at the club, and then throughout the day, wherever we are, we try to exercise a little. For instance, at the job, I stretch for a few minutes every morning and afternoon. When people ask me about it, I always tell them about the exercise club I go to. You’d be surprised at the number of people I’ve gotten to come with me. That’s really all we need to do.”

Jim didn’t know what to do. Finally, he leaned forward and said, “Mike, you’re fooling yourself. That exercise club is doing you no good. You’d be better off not going. You looked better before you started. Mike,” he said urgently, “you’ve got to get some exercise. You can’t just talk about it. You’ve got to do it. You look terrible.”

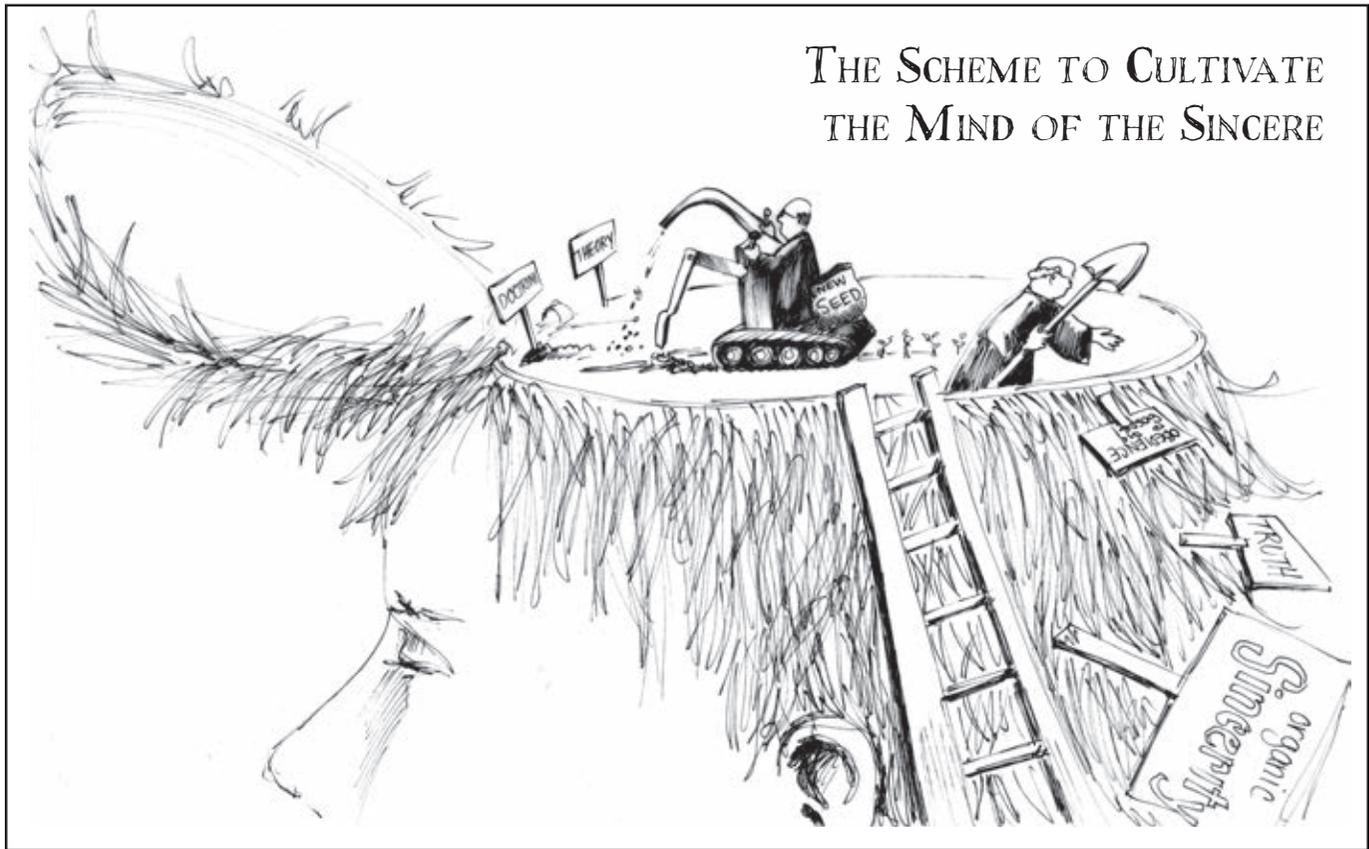
“Well, if that’s the way you feel about it, this friendship is over, buddy,” Mike snapped. “I don’t let anybody talk about my exercise club like that. Sure, we have problems. Everybody does, but at the exercise club we encourage one another. We talk about exercising all the time. Sometimes, I lay awake at night and think about the day...”

Mike trailed off. Astonished at what his friend was saying, Jim finished his sentence for him, “... when you’ll be fit and strong and soar just like those great athletes.” Mike nodded, overcome by emotion. That was his hope. Jim said goodbye and left. “Fantasy,” he thought, “sheer fantasy. How does he think he’s going to get there from here?”

A couple of years later Mike died of a massive heart attack. People from the exercise club asked Jim whether he’d like to come to the memorial service they were having for him. Mike had been one of their most faithful members. Jim declined. ❏



SEMINARY PLOT



THE SCHEME TO CULTIVATE
THE MIND OF THE SINCERE

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY THEY CALL SCHOOLS WHERE THEY TRAIN PASTORS AND PREACHERS *SEMINARIES*? Why don't they just call them preacher schools, or pastor colleges, or something of the like? Why, of all words, seminary? What really happens in those places that they would take on such a name? That really stirs a question in my mind.

You can see the root word semen in seminary, which always pertains to seeds. Where do you grow seeds? In a seed plot.

WHAT IS THE WHOLE POINT OF GROWING SEEDS, ANYWAY? Seeds are grown in a plot in order to produce a plant that can be planted somewhere outside of that plot, in some pre-planned place, with

a view to producing thousands of seeds of the same kind as the original plant. There is a definite plan, purpose, scheme, or plot involved in nursing those seeds to transplanting size.

**Have you seen
seminary students
when they go in and
when they come out?
There is a marked
difference in their
demeanor. Why?**

According to the fourth definition of the word seminary in *The American College Dictionary*, it means: a place of origin and

development. So if a seminary is a place of origin and development, what is it that is given birth to, or originated there, and what is it that is being developed? More importantly, why is all this being done? Have you noticed seminary students when they go in and when they come out? There is a marked difference in their demeanor. Why?

In most people's understanding, you go to seminary supposedly to learn God's word in depth. You're supposed to learn all the ins and outs of handling the Word and teaching others what God wants to communicate to mankind. The historical accounts, the documents, and all the writings, about what God has been doing since the creation

of the earth can all be found in seminaries.

THOSE WHO ACTUALLY GO TO SEMINARY GO FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. Some go because they know that with a seminary title after their name, they will earn a much larger salary. They can make a name for themselves. Others go because they think that it's the only place to learn about the Bible in depth. They were told that if they genuinely want to serve God with all their heart, they would have

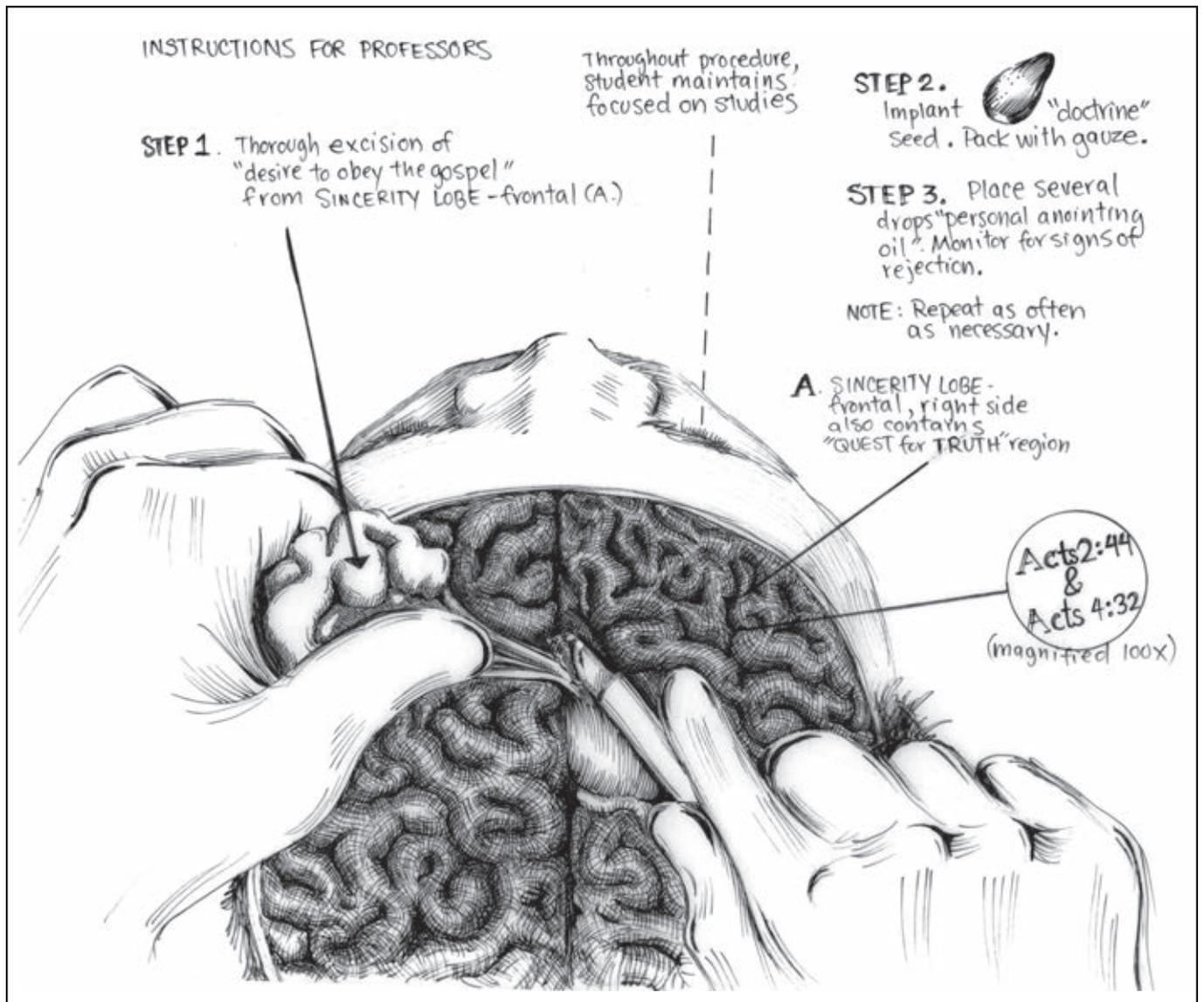
to go to seminary. Still others go out of sheer curiosity.

Sincere seminary students read the Bible and are affected by what they read, just like any sincere person. For example, they may read about the life of sharing and caring in Acts 2 and 4, and can't help wondering, "Why don't we live like that?" That's only one example of many things in the Bible that seem clearly stated, and require a response. Serious seminary

students see these things, and they wonder why they aren't being implemented in the churches, or in their lives. There is even a desire kindled in them to obey what they are reading.

EVERY SEMINARY HAS TEACHERS, PROFESSORS, AND MENTORS. Their job is to plant seeds. These are men and women burgeoning with the seeds of their learning. Their purpose is to ensure that these new minds become impregnated with all that they can

SURGICAL TECHNIQUE IN THE SEMINARY



pour into them. So, what kind of seeds are they implanting in these young, receptive minds?

The new students who really want the truth, like many people who have read the Bible, get stirred up about the things they hear or read which seem to demand a radical response. They wonder why these things are not being done. They simply want to obey what they are reading. The ultimate purpose of the professor is to ensure that this does not happen.

THE SENSITIVE ONES FEEL PERPLEXED, anxious, or just bad when they read things in the Scriptures that should be true in their lives or in their churches, but are not. What disturbs them more than anything else is that they have no idea how to put these truths into practice. So they go to seminary to find out.

With total trust and expectation, these students express the thoughts and desires that have been stirred up by what they have read in the Bible. They open their hearts and spirits to their professors. They want genuine faith to be implanted and to grow in their hearts. They want to embark on lives of total obedience to the word of God, some to the point that they get down on their knees, crying, and confessing things from the depths of their being to these men whom they trust with their very lives. Their

tender hearts are primed and ready for whatever will be disseminated into them. They are like newly-hatched birds that strain their necks upward toward the mother, with their beaks stretched wide open to receive whatever will be dropped into them.

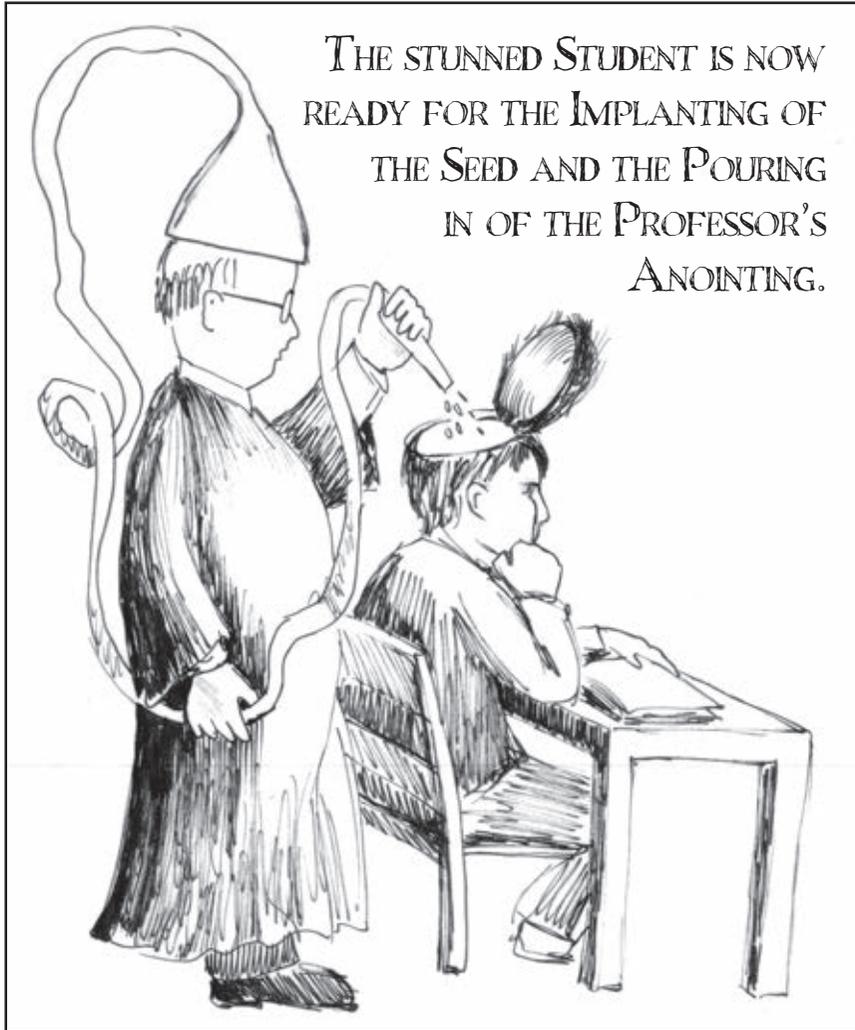
all understanding and desire for the truth, leaving only the desired doctrine deeply implanted.

The professors know which questions will arise concerning specific things that were said by the Son of God and the apostles, or that have happened in Christian history. They are not caught by surprise. They are ready when the unsuspecting student poses his questions, because he has been deeply affected by what he has read. The professors have had much practice concerning these matters.

WITH THE DEFT PRECISION OF PRACTICED surgeons, the professors, using their ready answers and teachings, dig into the fertile soil of the student's soul, excising every morsel of truthful inquiry, leaving only a gaping

wound. The stunned and sometimes appalled student is now ready for the implanting of the seed and the massaging of the anointing that the professor is under. Like anyone after surgery, the student is a bit sore, but as the wound heals with time and more teachings, the implanted seed begins to have the desired effect. If it doesn't take after repeated tries, the student is finally expelled from their midst as a rebel.

THE STUNNED STUDENT IS NOW
READY FOR THE IMPLANTING OF
THE SEED AND THE POURING
IN OF THE PROFESSOR'S
ANOINTING.



WHAT DO THE PROFESSORS DO with these inquiring, thirsty souls that are seeking to be filled with the truth? What do they fill them with?

THE FIRST STEP IS TO INTRODUCE ALL THE STUDENTS TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, which is the beginning of the destruction of that desire for the truth, and for knowing how to put it into practice. Just as certain herbicides selectively destroy weeds without destroying the desired plant, so does systematic theology destroy

We have already explained that a seminary is a place of origin and development. What is originated and developed in seminaries is their own "truth." To teach and encourage honest inquiry into the things that are clearly commanded in the Bible would be diametrically opposed to the very purpose of seminaries. They must originate and develop their own version of the truth in order that their denominations can be perpetuated.

EVERY DENOMINATION HAS SEMINARIES to sow its particular variety of seeds. Every seminary teaches systematic theology, but each one's systematic theology may be different from the others. Yet the purpose is the same: to replicate, or reproduce, that denomination's doctrine and spirit. This is the willful and calculated plan of any seminary.

During the last years of the student's time in seminary he is

tested and probed to see how well the seeds have germinated and grown in his soul. Those in whom the seeds have germinated with potency and vigor are graduated with honors, while the others are simply graduated.

To teach and encourage honest inquiry into the things that are clearly commanded in the Bible would be diametrically opposed to the very purpose of seminaries.

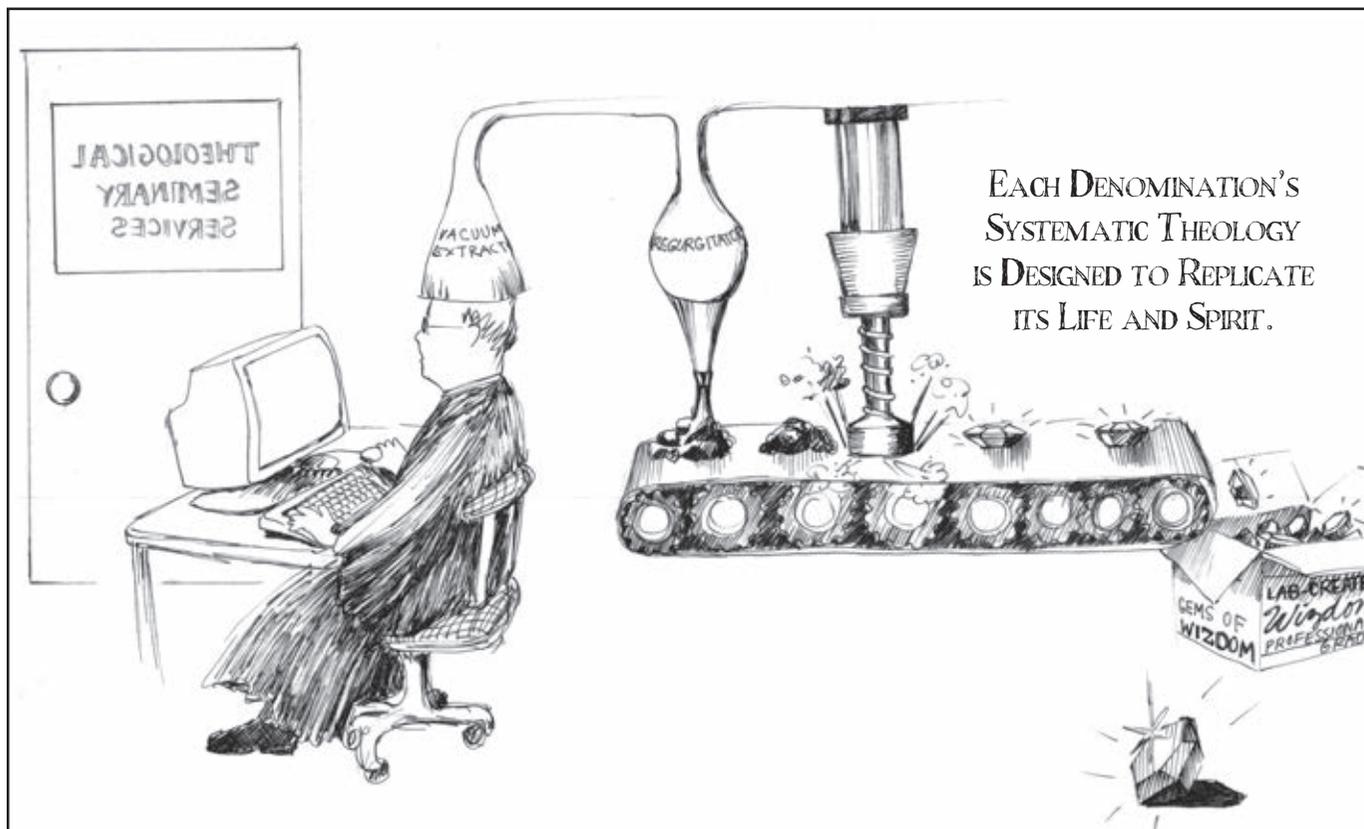
The students who walked into the seminaries years before, the ones who were honestly seeking to know God, now walk out thoroughly indoctrinated, mature, and potent with the seeds of their denominational dogma and spirit.

The honest inquiry of the student is no longer there. It has been replaced with the dogged determination of the new theologian to impose his theology over the troubling truths of the Word. The open student, willing to hear, and ready to learn, has become the closed pastor, unwilling to hear, but ready to preach.

ARMED WITH GLOWING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, and a title after his name, this polished seed-bearer of the seminary is given a congregation... a seed plot of his own. Some receive large plots, while others receive small plots. It all depends on how well he received the seeds of the seminary.

In this new plot he can safely spew forth his seed week after week, to be planted deeply into the receptive soil of unsuspecting souls, faithfully propagating and cultivating the seeds of the seminary's anointing.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. ■



WHEN THE SHEPHERD STRAYS

A True Story

Jim and Laura were the kind of people you instantly warm up to — kind, hospitable, and real. Their home was always open and full of activity, not the least of which was due to their three active boys. Generally there were guests at their table, especially after Sunday services at their independent and very evangelistic church. Jim was one of several men who had started the church and were considered elders. He did most of the preaching, and so most people considered him the pastor. Laura was a submissive wife, devoted mother, and gracious hostess.

THEIR CHURCH WAS FULL OF ZEALOUS CHRISTIANS, mostly young families and single people, who wanted their church to be based solidly on the Bible. Services were very lively and spontaneous, and Jim's sermons tended to be long and emotionally stimulating, always ending with an "altar call," both for getting saved and for re-dedicating one's life to Christ. It was during one such service that Jim noticed an attractive young woman who seemed engrossed in his message, never taking her eyes off him. He made a mental note to find out who she was and connect her with one of the leading women in the church. The opportunity came quickly, for she was one of several people who responded to the altar call.

Ann wanted to re-dedicate her life to Christ. She had been a Christian for

years, but had backslidden and needed a fresh start. She also needed a place to live. After praying with her, Jim took her to meet Laura and explained her predicament. Pushing past the signs of concern on his wife's face, Jim told Ann that she could come home with them.

Perhaps it was something in her husband's eyes or in his eagerness to invite Ann into their home. Whatever it was, Laura was uncomfortable with their new houseguest. She tried to push the anxious thoughts out of her mind. After all, they had had dozens of needy people stay in their home over the past fifteen years of their married life. But try as she might, she could never be comfortable with Ann in her home.

As the weeks went by, Jim gradually wound up spending more time with Ann, who had become his secretary,

and less time with his wife. It seemed to Laura that he was becoming disturbingly cold and distant with her and uncomfortably warm with Ann. Others in the church began to be concerned with Jim's and Ann's relationship and found discrete opportunities to ask Laura how things were going. At first she tried to assure everyone that all was well, but finally she expressed her fears to Jim's brother, Rick, also an elder in the church.

Rick gently tried to probe his brother Jim about his relationship with Ann, but Jim brushed off his concerns with the assurance that their ministry demanded a close working relationship. Rick tried to think the best. But then came the day when Laura arrived weeping at his door. She had returned



home at an unexpected time and found her husband together with Ann in their bed. They had not even noticed Laura as she fled from the house in anguish.

Keeping his composure with great difficulty, Rick confronted Jim with his sin, which he angrily denied. So Rick brought another elder along to confront Jim a second time. Again he denied his sin. Next, they called an elders' meeting and pleaded with Jim to confess his sin and repent, assuring him that healing was still possible for his marriage. Finally the matter was brought before the entire congregation, and Jim and Ann were excommunicated from the church. The leaders even went so far as to draft a letter that carefully documented the affair and mail it to every church member and also to friends of Jim and Laura who went to other churches. The letter urged everyone to shun Jim and Ann.

A few months later Jim was helping to lead another "Bible-believing" evangelical church. Is this a remarkable example of confession, repentance, and restoration? Far from it. Jim and Laura were divorced, their family shattered. Jim and Ann were married. They moved to a nearby town where they were warmly received into another church, enthusiastic to have a new, energetic Christian couple to add to their ministry programs.

My wife and I were friends of Jim and Laura [*not their real names*]. We were deeply troubled when we received the letter from their church, but we admired the way they had handled the situation, carefully following the Scriptures that relate to such matters. But as time went on and we heard what had become of Jim and Ann, we felt a gnawing sense of futility. What was the point of excommunicating them when they could simply move on to another town and go on with their lives as if nothing had ever happened? Had the Body of Christ become so impaired that such a harmful element could not be expelled from it? What

happens to a *human body* which has an immune system so dysfunctional or non-existent?

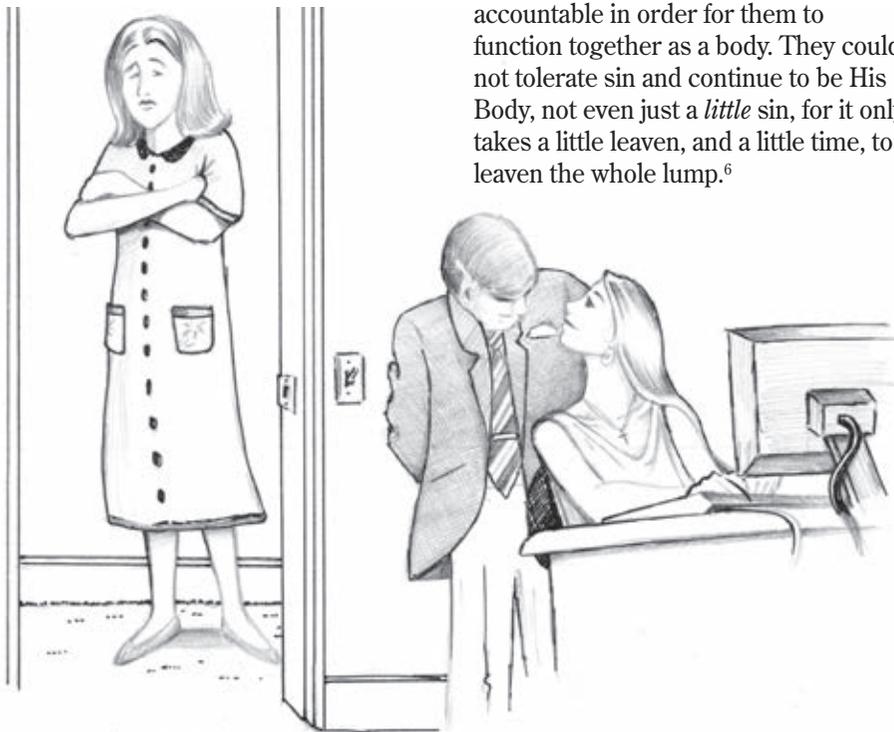
Dysfunctional Faith

Paul and the other apostles often had to deal with such moral problems. In the Corinthian church there was an immoral man, and Paul commanded them to *remove the wicked man from among themselves*,¹ for he had committed a sin unto death and his continued presence in the Body was a defiling influence. There was only one church in Corinth, so he could not just go down the street to a church of another denomination. Probably the nearest church at the time was in Philippi. What do you suppose would have happened if he had showed up in Philippi? It would have been obvious that he was not just an unbeliever off the streets, and he would have been obliged to give an account of himself. People did not just travel independently from church to church. They were *sent*, normally with a letter to the elders of

the church indicating the purpose for which they were sent. If someone who claimed to be a disciple arrived without being *sent*, then he was either a self-proclaimed false apostle spreading a strange teaching or a lawless person seeking to avoid whatever discipline was coming to him in his own church.

The apostles knew that if they did not deal decisively with sin in the camp, then it would destroy the church. The Apostle Paul spoke of such corruption as leaven — comparing sin to the effect of yeast in a lump of dough.² Yeast thrives on sugar, reproduces itself rapidly, and causes the dough to rise by separating the wheat particles with bubbles of carbon dioxide. In the same way, sin thrives on the things that appeal to the flesh; it multiplies and permeates and separates. It alienates people and pushes them apart.

Salt kills leaven. That is why our Master Yahshua³ said, "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."⁴ He knew that His disciples would need to speak the truth to one another in love⁵ and hold each other accountable in order for them to function together as a body. They could not tolerate sin and continue to be His Body, not even just a *little* sin, for it only takes a little leaven, and a little time, to leaven the whole lump.⁶



¹1 Corinthians 5:13 ²Mt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13 ³Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See p. 19 for an explanation. ⁴Mark 9:50 ⁵Ephesians 4:14-16 ⁶1 Corinthians 5:6 ⁷Colossians 4:16; 2 Peter 3:14-17 ⁸1 Corinthians 5:7-8 ⁹1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9 ¹⁰Luke 12:1; Matthew 16:6,11,12

But isn't that just what the elders of Jim's church had done? Hadn't they dealt decisively with his sin? Hadn't they obeyed the Scriptures and saved their church from continued defilement? But what did the Apostle Paul mean by *the whole lump*? Was he referring only to a single congregation? Paul's letters and the letters of the other apostles were circulated among all of the churches, for they were all under apostolic authority, and the apostles stood together, supporting each other's authority.⁷ Their concern was for *all* the churches that together formed one body. They knew that the Body of Messiah could only be truly represented as one unleavened loaf.⁸

Christianity today is *the whole lump completely leavened*. Paul's warnings to the early churches⁹ ultimately went unheeded. They tolerated a little leaven and it leavened the whole lump, making it worthless — unfit to represent the Messiah.

How did it happen? They lost their saltiness and were unwilling and unable to drive out the leaven. Our Master had said, "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."¹⁰ He explained to His disciples that He was talking about their *teaching* and hypocrisy. They taught one thing and did another; they were filled with knowledge, but void of love. Paul echoed our Master's words in his admonition to the Corinthians, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."¹¹ The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees entered into the early church and transformed it into what today is known as Christianity — fully leavened, puffed up with Bible knowledge that has only produced division.

The Mutation

Leaven modifies the structure of the dough, causing a transition or mutation from one nature to another. Just as the prophet Isaiah said of old Israel, "the faithful city has become a harlot!"¹²

and just as Paul feared was happening to the church in Corinth,¹³ the church was led astray. This transformation is a fact of history. The betrothed virgin *became* a harlot. The dwelling place of the Holy Spirit *became* a dwelling place of demons:

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality. (Revelation 18:2-3)

This prophetic description of the fully leavened loaf known as Christianity today was written near the end of the first century, when the leavening process was well under way, but not yet complete. The letter of James, written early in the second century, describes the church at a more advanced stage of leavening — puffed up with pride, devoid of compassion, riddled with jealousy and backbiting, and driven by lust for wealth, power, and pleasure — a far cry from the unleavened loaf described in the beginning.

What began as a covenant community of disciples who shared all things in common, who had one mind and one heart and one way, and who loved one another fervently¹⁴ *became* a world-wide religion of millions of independent individuals and thousands of denominations whose interrelationships have run the gamut from sadistic warfare to cold indifference. What was once characterized by the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth *became* a

fully leavened lump of hypocrisy and deceit.¹⁵

Where do we go from here?

The deeply disturbing divorce of Jim and Laura was one of the last straws that broke the back of the "camel" of Christianity, as far as my wife and I were concerned. Although we continued to go to church, we were disillusioned and disoriented, just going through the motions, having no confidence that Christianity could ever be restored back to the way the church was in the beginning.

It was then that we stumbled upon a treasure hidden in a field. We met a community of disciples who lived together and shared all things in common, just as we had read about in the book of Acts. On closer inspection, we discovered that they were not just one isolated community, but part of a whole network of close-knit communities, having the same heart, the same faith, and the same way of life. Their simple life of love and unity shook us to the very foundation of our faith, which was revealed to be shifting sand, and not the Rock of the true Messiah.

As much as we had wanted to follow the true Son of God whom we had read about in the scriptures, it was an exercise in futility, for as we then discovered, He can only be served *where He is* — that is, in His Body, which is an unleavened loaf, not the stale and scattered crumbs of the fully leavened loaf of Christianity. And we learned that the only way to become a part of His Body is by utterly forsaking one's own fully leavened individual life in the world, just as the Messiah Himself consistently taught:¹⁶

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and

¹¹1 Corinthians 8:1 ¹²Isaiah 1:21 ¹³2 Corinthians 11:2-3 ¹⁴Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35; Jeremiah 32:39; John 13:34-35 ¹⁵1 Corinthians 5:8 ¹⁶Mark 10:17,21,28-30; Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 9:23-26; 14:26-33; etc.



THE GREAT COMMISSION

Someday soon the call would come, “*Go – make disciples – baptizing them* —” Everything in me was ready, except...

I REMEMBER THE EXCITING DAYS in seminary when veteran missionaries would come to speak in the chapel services, telling of the great challenges of taking the gospel to every tribe and tongue and nation. Our hearts would pound with the anticipation of being sent out to some remote corner of the earth to do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission. It made us want to study harder and finish with high marks so as to be most attractive to the leading missions organizations, such as *Wycliffe* and *Youth with a Mission*. We imagined that there, on the mission field, was the place to serve God in the most radical, whole-hearted manner possible.

In our idealistic zeal, some of us dared to ask uncomfortable questions as we puzzled over things in the scriptures that didn't seem to match up with what we were seeing and hearing.

Especially problematic was the Great Commission itself:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

We heard a lot about the “Go” part. That was exciting. The world was a big place, full of opportunities. And we heard a lot about the “make disciples” part — how to make the gospel clear and simple, so that we could get to the “baptizing them” part. That's what got people excited in the churches back home, giving them confidence to keep supporting the work with their tithes and offerings. But when it came to the

“teaching them” part, something was missing.

Oh, there was certainly no lack of teaching materials being developed for the mission field, but the emphasis was on teaching Christian doctrine and moral principles. Somehow the “obey all that I have commanded you” part never got much attention. That was the uncomfortable part. It was more encouraging to skip to the “lo, I am with you always” part, and think about Jesus coming back as soon as we could get the gospel to all the remote corners of the earth.

But, try as I might, I could not escape that nagging question: What about all the things Jesus commanded *them*, His first disciples? After all, that was who

He was speaking to, wasn't it? Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the others. What had He commanded *them*? Deep inside I sensed that the reason it was an uncomfortable subject in seminary was because we could hardly teach anyone else to obey what we ourselves had not obeyed.

For starters, I was haunted by the way it all began for those first disciples:

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

IT WAS THE SAME FOR ALL OF THE TWELVE — they all left everything and followed the Master. Of course, we comforted ourselves with the excuse that we were going to serve the Lord full time, either as pastors or missionaries, but what about everyone else? We weren't about to command everyone to "leave their nets" to follow Him, unless they felt they were being called to the ministry. But that still didn't wash. Leaving everything behind had been the *starting point* for those

first disciples, not a higher calling for the chosen few after they had been saved for awhile.

Even the twelve didn't realize that the call to discipleship was the same for everyone until one day a rich young man came running up to the Master and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹ He wasn't inquiring about going into the full-time ministry; he was asking for *eternal life*. That's why the Master's answer was so startling, not only to him, but also to the disciples:

"Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:22-27)

You can see that the disciples were about to come into a greater understanding. It was not unusual in their day for a radical teacher to have a small, devoted group of



disciples surrounding him, but this was entering into a different realm — *salvation itself was at stake*. These poor fishermen could not imagine that rich people would give up everything to follow Yahshua,* but He gently reminded them that there was a power beyond a man's own natural understanding that could lift him out of his lonely existence — that is, *faith*. Peter "got it"...

Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you!"

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or wife or children or lands, for My

¹Mark 10:17 ²"Hate" in this verse is explained in 10:37-39 — "who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." ³Mark 10:27 ⁴In John 2:23-25, "believe" and "entrust" are exactly the same word in the original Greek text. *Yahshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. See page 19 for an explanation.



And whoever does not take up his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26,27,33)

IT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR, THEN, that the *first* thing Yahshua commanded His disciples was to forsake everything in order to follow Him, and upon that foundation of obedience He could give them more commandments. Unless they began with obedience, there was no point in commanding them to do anything else, for they would not be able to obey it anyway, being just natural men. As He had explained to the disciples, the faith that they had received to leave all and follow Him is what opened up to them the

power to do the impossible,³ for that is what set them apart as His special people to whom He could entrust Himself.

There were many who claimed to believe in Him, but He would not entrust Himself to them, for they would not entrust themselves to Him.⁴ They were excited to witness the miracles that He did, but were content to continue living their independent lives in the world. So how “in the world” could they obey His commandments? For example,

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the

kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33)

HOW COULD A MAN NOT WORRY about how to provide for himself and his family? In those days, if a man did not labor diligently to wrest a living from the reluctant earth,⁵ he and his family would either starve or be reduced to beggars or slaves. How do you suppose Zebedee the fisherman felt when his two sons, James and John, suddenly left him to “seek first the kingdom of God” by following this itinerant preacher, Yahshua of Nazareth?⁶ How irresponsible! But they had come under the “Godspell,” trusting that God was going to take care of them, somehow.

And take care of them He did, not by beggary or social welfare programs, but by the miracle of the love that was poured out in their hearts when they truly surrendered their lives and clung together as commonwealth, looking after each other’s needs and not their own.⁷ Their life together was the only context in which they could obey the “new commandment,” which was the distinguishing mark of Yahshua’s disciples:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples. (John 13:34-35)

The greatest expression of obedience to this commandment is seen in the results of Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Master’s resurrection:

sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:28-30)

There was no getting around it: forsaking one’s life and possessions was not just a more radical step for the over-zealous few, but was the very starting point for anyone who would follow the Son of God. He couldn’t have said it more clearly or emphatically than He did here:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate² his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

⁵Genesis 3:17-19 ⁶Genesis 3:17-19 ⁷Philippians 2:4, NRSV (Other translations insert the words *merely* and *also*, which are not in the original Greek text, but make the verse much more comfortable.)

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple courts, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47)

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

THIS WAS ANOTHER PASSAGE that haunted me in seminary, and the attempts by my professors to explain it away didn't sit right with me. To me it was simple: Peter preached the same gospel that he himself had obeyed,⁸ and 3000 people responded in the very same way he had responded — they

all gave up everything to follow Yahshua by following the apostles who had followed Yahshua.⁹ The result was a community — “all who believed were together and had all things in common.”¹⁰

Obviously, Peter had simply obeyed the Great Commission: “make disciples ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” We don't have a record of everything Peter spoke to those who wanted to be saved, but only the assurance, “And with *many other words* solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’”¹¹ Those who heeded these *many other words* were baptized and received the Holy Spirit, “whom God has given to those who obey Him.”¹² Their obedience resulted in the abundant life of love and unity that is so vividly recorded in the next few verses.

THE SPIRIT THEY RECEIVED empowered them to love one another just as their Savior had loved His first disciples, to whom He had given that *new* commandment: “Love one another just as I have loved you.”¹³ How had He loved *them*? You must remember that He gave that commandment on the night before He was crucified. His disciples had been with Him night and day for the past three and a half years. They had experienced His tender care for them daily in countless ways, even to the point of Him washing their dirty feet that very evening, like a common servant. “Love one another just as I have

loved you.” What do you think His disciples understood when He said those words to them that night? How had He loved them? That is how they taught the 3000 to love one another: By laying down their lives for one another *every day*.¹⁴ The new commandment can mean nothing less.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him.

Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. (John 14:15,21,24)

I did not learn this in seminary. I was not taught to fulfill the Great Commission, nor was I even able to do so, as I myself was a product of the Great *Omission*. I was not taught to obey His commandments. But since I was willing to obey them, the Father drew me to His Son, that is, to the true Body of Messiah, where true disciples were obeying His commandments, laying down their lives for one another every day. There I heard the true gospel and was finally able to do what I had always wanted to do — become one of Yahshua's disciples by giving up everything and following Him. I have received His Holy Spirit, and I am learning how to love my brothers and sisters. As we learn to obey Him more and more, He is revealing Himself to us more and more, just as He promised.¹⁵ It is much better than seminary. It is eternal life! ☒

⁸Mark 10:28 ⁹Acts 2:42 ¹⁰Acts 2:44 ¹¹Acts 2:40 ¹²Acts 5:32 ¹³John 13:34 ¹⁴John 3:14; Luke 9:23; Hebrews 3:13; Acts 2:46-47 (note the word *daily*) ¹⁵John 14:21

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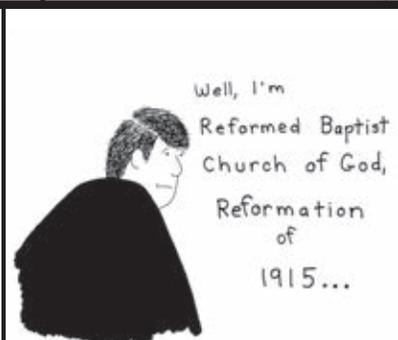
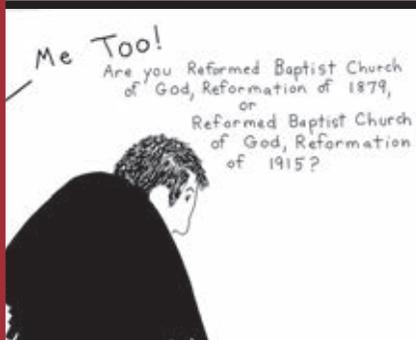
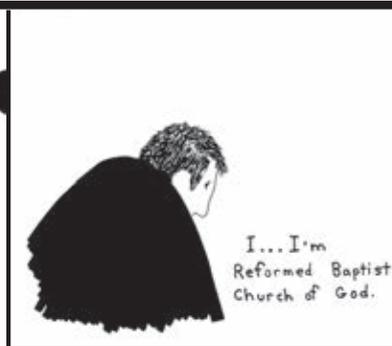
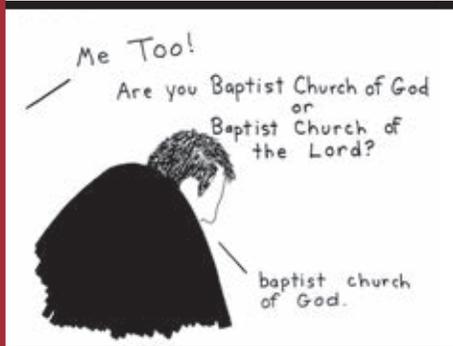
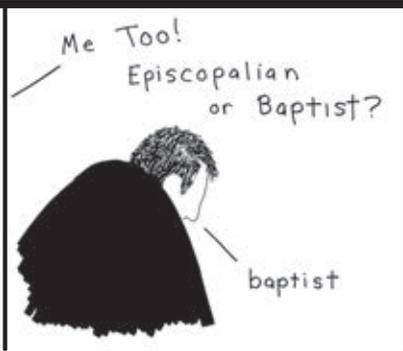
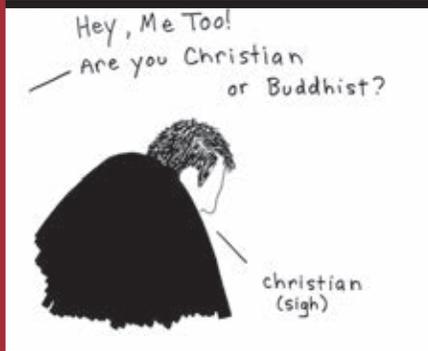
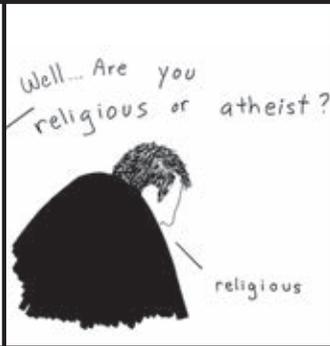
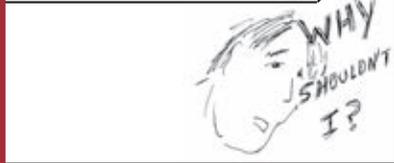
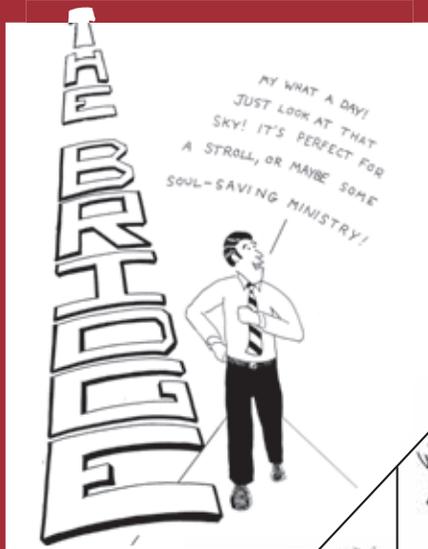
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***Yahshua** is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. It was transliterated into Greek as *Iesous*, and then again into English as *Jesus*. The original name combines Yah (the Hebrew name of God) with *shua* (Hebrew for *salvation*). It is the perfect name for the One who would bring to all the people of God (Yah) salvation (*shua*) from their sins.



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